
SILENCE IS STRANGER THAN IT USED TO BE: TEACHING SILENCE AND THE FUTURE OF HUMANKIND

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Abstract

Silence needs to be shown to be taught. This is because the nonverbal, which is a different way of referencing the world than symbols, cannot be translated into words. Teaching silence is of special importance today because of the connection between silence and the creation of existential meaning, as well as the functioning of the creative process itself. The loss of silence in our culture will result in the loss of religious meaning and the impairment of creativity. Without deep meaning and the creative process the human species is at risk.

Silence is stranger than it used to be,¹ but it still has deep religious roots. The *Encyclopedia of Religion* calls silence “one of the essential elements in all religions,” and the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* adds: “Silence is a familiar phenomenon in the history of religion and is employed in both private and public worship.” Religious educators should, therefore, take more responsibility for its teaching in their daily tasks.

To explore the strangeness of silence and its role in religious education, I will begin by saying why silence is stranger than it used to be. I will then discuss three levels of “referencing,” as described by Terrence Deacon, to explain how postmodern communication has been severed from its roots in silence.

Third, I will acknowledge and reflect on the relentless ambiguity of the cluster of words—*silence*, *quiet*, and *still*—by which we refer to

Gratitude is expressed to the congregation of Reedwood Friends Church in Portland, Oregon, for the invitation to be their theologian-in-residence during April 1999, and to give the annual Center for Christian Studies Lectures, which included this topic.

¹ See Anderson 1990. This delightful survey of the postmodern world was the stimulus for the title of this essay.

the experience and fact of silence. This ambiguity further demonstrates why the teaching of silence must show what silence is, rather than speaking about it.

To “show” silence, teachers need what Paul Ricoeur called a “second naïveté.” Howard Gardner’s concept of aesthetic development and James Fowler’s faith-development theory will help elaborate this point. I will then link silence with the creation of existential meaning.

Meaning is more than verbal coherence. It also includes an awareness of presence. Presence reveals itself generously in silence, whether the relationship is with God, others, the deep self, or nature.

The capital-*T* truth is known first in the silence of ontological appreciation and only later in words. We are too often blinded by “logocentrism” in the West, as Jacques Derrida has warned. We too often begin with words and end with words. The antidote to this is silence.

I will conclude by suggesting the importance of silence in one of the daily tasks of a religious educator: the telling of sacred stories.

THE STRANGENESS OF SILENCE

We often think of silence as the lack of sound, movement, or communication. In nature we say there is silence when the forest is still or the lake is calm. The forest or lake, however, does not disappear because it is still. We can still know what is present if we can be silent and receive it.

Silence is present as an opening and as a waiting for knowledge. Human silence is also present when there is nothing to say, as well as when there is too much to say.

Some people are silent because they are physically unable to speak or because they have been forced not to speak. This does not mean that we cannot know them. We can know them well if we approach their silence with our silence.

Today such silence is in danger of disappearing as a way of knowing. It is being “silenced” in at least four ways:

1. The presence communicated by silence is considered to be a “text” for deconstruction, a focal point for endless interpretation, whether the silence is in nature, among people, with God, or within one’s deepest self.
2. Everyone is paying attention to something else. Some can only “focus” if there is opposing noise on which to concentrate. Others

focus on being unfocused. They are tuned in and turned on to multiple channels. Sound is reversing its ground. It is becoming the symbol of nonpresence, noncommunication, and nonmeaning. Postmodern "silence" is noisy!

3. The postmodern grand narrative undermines the ability to be aware of silence. It is as totalitarian as any other grand narrative, but does not prohibit silence by the power of legislation, argument, or threat. It works more subtly, by an unrelenting analysis of silence.
4. Today's evaporation of silence has disrupted the creative process, the crowning achievement of *Homo sapiens*. There is little brooding silence left in which to scan our inner and outer worlds for new ways of being and communicating.

Each of the four modes of silence suppression raises questions about our capacity for referencing what is real. Let us therefore ask first how *Homo sapiens* do their referencing. This will help us better understand nonverbal communication, and enable us to show why silence is necessary for human beings to create meaning adequate for living and dying.

SILENCE AND THE LEVELS OF REFERENCING

The disenchantment and mathematization of nature that began in the seventeenth century has shifted in our time to an appreciation for what is elusive and indeterminate. This perspective and the development of new technologies have brought about vast changes in science. The cognitive revolution, which is part of this change, has been described in Howard Gardner's *The Mind's New Science* (1985).

New ways of thinking and the use of new technologies to explore the mind and brain have sharpened the discussion about how human beings make references. I will use Terrence Deacon's theory about the coevolution of language and the brain to explore this idea.

Deacon identified three levels of referencing (1997, 69–101) and used the terminology of C. S. Peirce to name them. He also borrowed Peirce's idea that referencing is not an invariant relationship with the world but an ongoing interpretation of that relationship. The three kinds of referencing are *iconic*, *indexical*, and *symbolic*.

To illustrate *iconic* referencing, let us suppose that a moth, whose wings resemble the graininess and color of a particular tree's bark, is at rest. The moth, depending on the interpretation of a bird looking

for food, is like or unlike the bark of the tree. If the moth moves, but the bird is inattentive and does not notice the difference between the moth and the bark, then the bird's iconic interpretation of sameness remains, and the meal is missed. An iconic relationship, therefore, is one we notice as likeness (moth-to-bark, portrait-to-person).

The second kind of relationship is an *indexical* relationship, which exists when we interpret the experience of something, such as smoke, as indicative of something else, like fire. Suppose a small, furry, black-and-white creature—a skunk—crosses our field of vision. The sighting stimulates the memory of a very disagreeable odor. Wishing to avoid the stench, we avoid the skunk.

The third kind of relationship, *symbolic*, is what makes us the “symbolic species.” Language is a collection of social conventions called symbols. Either a tacit or explicit cultural code establishes the relationship between a symbol and what it represents, such as a wedding ring that symbolizes a marital agreement. As I have said, no particular object is intrinsically an icon, index, or symbol, but is interpreted in that way. In the case of symbolic referencing, the token of the relationship is a sound or mark that suggests nothing about the relationship until social convention establishes the connection.

Deacon argues that language did not supersede or replace the two other forms of referencing. Language evolved in parallel, and depends on the other two forms of reference to create meaning. For example, innate calls and gesture systems, such as those available to primates, still exist in humans, along with an ability to use symbolic language.

Innate calls and gestures, however, involve different regions of the brain from those that control speech production and language comprehension. This explains physiologically why it is impossible to translate smiles, grimaces, laughs, sobs, hugs, kisses—and all “panhuman nonlinguistic communications”—into words. They are part of a communication system, which is unlike although parallel to symbolic referencing.

The three referencing levels are also related hierarchically. Symbolic relationships are composed of indexical relationships among sets of indices. Indexical relationships are composed of iconic relationships among sets of icons. To construct an interpretation which is symbolic, a person must build from lower-order forms and replace or represent them by higher-order forms.

The dependence of symbolic referencing on indexical and iconic referencing helps explain what is meant by the phrase, “There is

silence in the saying.” The silence of nonverbal communication provides the context and ground for what we have to say. Without nonverbal communication words lose experiential richness and depth.

Crossing the threshold into symbolic referencing takes both learning and unlearning; symbols are not learned one at a time. A logically complete system of relationships among symbol tokens must be learned before the symbolic association between a symbol token and its object can be determined. As Deacon says, “It’s hard to get started.”

The shift that takes place when crossing the symbolic threshold is the result of having built prior associations of indexical experiences, which in turn were built from iconic distinctions. Over time, tokens of indexical references are built up, until suddenly the implicit pattern in the indexical associations is recognized. No one can do this for us. It must be discovered personally (Deacon 1997, 93).

The “discovery” that Deacon identifies, it seems to me, can be described as an application of the creative process, usually associated only with discoveries in language. In this case the creative process moves a person from one kind of referencing to another.

Symbolic referencing takes place the moment we let go of one associative strategy and “grab hold of another higher-order one to guide our memory searches.” This is the moment in the creative process, I would suggest, when nonverbal and often-unconscious scanning forms an insight that can then be put into words.

We might call the use of the creative process to develop a new level of reference a *vertical use*. A *horizontal use* involves making discoveries through use of a single level, although creating in upper referencing levels is also rooted in those below.

In this learning-unlearning process we are at times in danger of unlearning better than we learn. This is dramatically illustrated by Williams syndrome (WS). WS is represented in highly verbal individuals who seem adept at storytelling and in reciting verbal information, but who also exhibit major cognitive deficits in analyzing thematic-level language processes. They also have poor problem-solving abilities and impaired spatial reasoning.

Although children with WS may have IQ scores in the range of 50, their vocabulary and speaking skills at early ages may test above normal. Despite this mix of abilities and disabilities they are intensely social and gregarious and display a “constant wide grin” (Deacon 1997, 268). WS children are like people who memorize entries from a dictionary or encyclopedia but who have never had the experiences

to which the words they memorized refer. The words they use are not rooted in indexical or iconic referencing experiences.

WS is a case in which indexical learning abilities are poorer than normal. As Deacon argued, "Discovering an alternative mnemonic strategy to hold together a weak network of indexical associations may lead them to rely more heavily on higher-order combinatorial patterns than do normal children. But lacking indexical support, they are far more trapped by word-association logic alone" (1997, 271). In my terms, they are trapped in words about words. Their speech is not enriched by the silence of the nonverbal iconic and indexical referencing.

Language cannot "make sense," then, without the involvement of our senses. Our speech must be enriched by silence to carry adequate meaning.

Why? Let us take as an example the words we use for the experience of silence. What is unsatisfactory about them? To answer this question our focus must shift directly to the tokens of symbolic reference themselves. They are the words *silence*, *quiet*, and *still*.

THE AMBIGUITY OF LANGUAGE ABOUT SILENCE

No single term seems to exhaust the meaning of "silence." In German, for example, the word for "quiet" is *die Ruhe* or *die Stille*. The word for "still" is *die Stille*. The word for "silence" is *das Schweigen* (or *die Ruhe* or *die Stille*). This complex of stillness, quiet, and silence is interlocked in many languages, including English.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* states that *still* comes to us from Germany, Friesland, Norway, and Denmark, but that *quiet* and *silence* entered the language from Latin. In Latin *quietus* means to be at rest or quiet. The verb *quiescere* means to come to rest. *Tranquillus* means "still," and *silentium* means "silence."

The verb *to still*, however, adds the connotation of motion to what the noun and adjective signify. There is also an added emotional association, for the *OED* associates *to still* with calming, relieving, keeping back, pacifying, lulling, soothing, and inducing one to cease from weeping, or, as the *OED* elegantly states, "to check the turbulence of a person."

When examining the verb *to silence*, we find the sense of causing or compelling one to cease speaking, or to overcome another in argu-

ment. It is also used as a military term to indicate a cease-fire, or disabling an enemy's cannon by superior fire.

The imperative use of these words is also interesting. The command "Silence!" shuts down public sound. "Quiet!" calls for an absence of disturbance or tumult, but it is not merely other-directed. Reaching this more peaceful condition requires inner activity. Finally, the construction "be still" is not as forceful as a single-word command, and refers to motion as well as sound.

Further ambiguity results when *still* is used as an adverb, because the word also means "in addition to" or "in further degree," as in the phrase "still alive." The word also is used to indicate a contrary sense, such as in the phrase "different and yet still alike." These meanings, suggesting duration, add the quality of time to what we find in the noun and adjectival forms, while also reinforcing the link between being still and in motion.

As said above, much of the interpretation of symbolic speech is determined by parallel systems of nonverbal communication. In the case of silence this can be shown by the following:

Stillness (as movement)	
Quiet (as inner motivation or cause)	Silence (as outer motivation or cause)
Stillness (as sound)	

Silence compelled from the outside sits to the far right on the horizontal quiet-silence axis. If generated from within silence is located toward the left. The range of meaning encompassing the stilling of the body to quiet the mind, or the quieting of the mind to still the body, is shown on the vertical stillness axis.

Two forces in combination, such as stillness-as-sound and motivation-from-within, can be located in the lower-left quadrant. Where the meaning should be positioned depends on the relative strength of the two forces.

To take another example, silence as the result of a physical inability to utter sound is caused by something "outside" one's will. This combination of vectors will appear in the lower right-hand quadrant, because it involves two forces, stillness-as-sound and silence-imposed-from-the-"outside."

Much of what we experience as silence is communicated at the levels of iconic and indexical referencing, as illustrated by the above graph. This is why our symbolic tokens referring to silence are so confusing. Borrowing a couplet from Robert Frost, we might paraphrase:

Our words dance around in a ring and suppose
while silence sits in the middle and knows.

Ideally, this section should have produced a neat definition of *silence*, with no verbal remainder. As you can see, however, this task has proven impossible. What I have done instead is to construct a rough graph showing modes and vectors of the connotations in meaning.

What follows from this ironic, not iron, logic of language is that when it comes to teaching silence, who is communicating is more important than what is said. This is because much of the verbal meaning of silence is carried by nonverbal connotation read parallel to the symbolic referencing.

THE SECOND NAÏVETÉ, AND SHOWING SILENCE

How can we show the “is-ness” of silence, since symbolic referencing does not clearly convey its meaning? Someone needs to show us, but who? It might be another adult, but nature often uses an intergenerational approach: children show adults and adults show children. When adults and children are segregated or silence is not identified or valued in their relationships, then the mutual learning between children and adults breaks down, as it often does in our culture. Adults need to model the correct approach to other adults, so they can model it to children and support their valuing, identification, naming, and use of silence.

In *Godly Play* (Berryman 1995) I discussed the two great gates into our humanity. They were the gate of relationships, discovered in infancy, and the gate of language, which is passed through around our second year. There is a third and related gate. It is the doorway into the second naïveté, at which point we regain sensitivity to the kinds of knowing we had before language. People who have passed through this gate, I would like to suggest, are especially qualified for teaching silence.

The term “second naïveté” was coined by Paul Ricoeur (1967) and used by James Fowler to define his fifth stage, conjunctive faith (1981,

187–88). Fowler found that this stage occurred late in adulthood; however, most of us have moments of such knowing much earlier. These isolated experiences are not pervasive enough to be called a “stage,” that is, a global way of interpreting the world.

Ricoeur became interested in the second naïveté because of his interest in interpretation. As he said, “Whenever a man dreams or raves, another man arises to give an interpretation” (1967, 350). We live in a sea of interpretation in which, as Ricoeur said, “Symbols give rise to thought.”

If a symbol is to give rise to thought one must enter into the symbol and believe in it. During life’s early years we have a natural ability to dwell in symbols and to believe in them. Later, critical reasoning takes over, and the first naïveté evaporates. At the time of the second naïveté, however, one enters by conscious choice into the circle of believing to know and knowing to believe.

Some have argued that Ricoeur’s idea is a vicious circle, empty of meaning, but Ricoeur has called it “a living and stimulating circle.” Ricoeur continues: “[T]he second immediacy that we seek and the second naïveté that we await are no longer accessible to us anywhere else than in a hermeneutics; we can believe only by interpreting. It is the ‘modern’ mode of belief in symbols, an expression of the distress of modernity and a remedy for that distress” (1967, 352). It is by entering this circle that the tools of interpretation, which modernity gave us, can help us “transcend” modernity. “The second naïveté aims to be the postcritical equivalent of the precritical hierophany” (352).

I would like to add that children are naïve only from an adult perspective. As children, they are open and able to participate deeply in the world around them, to connect with the world and to know it personally. As adults we learn how to be critical and to distance ourselves from the world to get perspective. The second naïveté is not a return to childhood. It is a choice to be open and to participate in the world, at appropriate times, in a childlike way, so that we can give symbols adequate interpretation.

Adults who act like children, unconsciously or consciously, are childish. They fool no one except, perhaps, themselves. The second naïveté is something else. It is the reawakening of what Edward Robinson called the “original vision” (1977). To pass through this gate may require a shock: a profound loss, the experience of stunning beauty, the arrival of grandchildren. One’s cognitive and developmental situ-

ation is overwhelmed. Distance dissolves. The urge to control softens. Intimacy and synthesis, rather than analysis and distance, come to be preferred.

Fowler refers to this experience as a way of knowing that moves beyond the dichotomizing logic of either-or and that sees all sides simultaneously. He writes: "Conjunctive faith suspects that things are organically related to each other; it attends to the pattern of interrelatedness in things, trying to avoid force-fitting to its own prior mindset" (1981, 185). The tools of the previous stage are no longer trusted except as "tools to avoid self-deception and to order truths encountered in other ways" (188).

The second naïveté is a return to valuing the body-knowing of the child rather than words about relationships or words about words about relationships. The need to achieve symbolic coherence dissipates, and words lose their linking power in favor of unspoken connections with life. The value of iconic and indexical knowing is reevaluated and once again given credibility.

In the realm beyond the third gate our relationships count for more than words. At this "place" in life, one knows that this is true, but people who know do not need to speak about it. (As children, we could not speak about it and had no other way of knowing to compare it to.) Silence as a way of knowing and being steps into the foreground; symbolic referencing steps back.

Here is an example. In the summer of 1998 my mother was diagnosed with cancer. There was no longer a possibility of medical help. Mom said to me quietly on the back porch, "There is really nothing more to say, is there?" When people entered a room where she sat, she would get up, frail as she was, and move toward them, usually in silence, to receive a hug, and then return quietly to her chair.

This process continued when she went to the family cabin in Colorado a few days later. By this time her children and their spouses, grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren had arrived to be with her. She tired easily, so she often moved into the back bedroom to rest. One evening, a few days before she died, her six-year-old great-granddaughter kept going silently in and out of the bedroom, bringing flowers she had picked on the mountainside and carefully arranged into bouquets. The two one-year-old twins also kept coming back to see her, one in the early stages of exuberant walking and the other still crawling. Mom said, "I just love to hear their voices." They, as yet, had no words, but

their sounds and movement, their presence, carried them close to her and her close to them.

Such vectors and modes of being are not symbolic language, yet this kind of knowing and communication is profound. It is this kind of knowing that we regain when we pass through the third great gate and enter the second *naïveté*. Nothing can overwhelm such knowing at this stage. It is too well-tested, too real, too connected.

Such knowing also refreshes creative energies, because much of the work of the imagination takes place in silence. Given the loss of silence, some postmodern thinkers have foretold the demise of the imagination in our species. These statements lead to the realization that the loss of silence and the demise of the imagination are connected, and that both have a bearing on our future.

SILENCE AND THE IMAGINATION

An ability to know in silence and to communicate silently enables appreciation of the silent aspects of the creative process in other living creatures. This is what I think Richard Kearney means by the “ethics of the imagination” referred to in the conclusion of his book, *The Wake of Imagination* (1988). In this postmodern age of words about words, it is a matter of ethical importance to slow down, to listen until we hear, and to respect the silence in other people, in our own deep self, in nature, and in God.

The ethics of the imagination is a matter of respect for “the other,” but it is also an ethic of emergency. The ability to hear silence may be dying out. If that happens, then the imagination will disintegrate. It is true that what humans do with our imagination often endangers the world, but without it we lack even the possibility of coping with destructive tendencies.

Hearing silence, then, is of broader importance than passing on the tradition of silence through religious education. It is also a way for religious traditions to take the lead in helping to heal our hearing, so humans can know silence and its value for communication and meaning. Religious language often functions to maintain the status quo, but when it comes to silence we are running out of time. It is time for religious educators to lead the way back to the roots of our words and creativity. Both are deeply grounded in the nonverbal stuff of life.

I have already suggested that silent knowing and the creative process are grounded in the modes and vectors of our earliest knowing. It is now time to fill out that statement in greater detail. I will follow primarily the work of Howard Gardner. In Gardner's first book, *The Arts and Human Development* ([1973] 1994), he traced three themes in aesthetic development: *perception*, *emotion*, and *making*. Awareness of these themes is important, because, as Gardner writes, the arts "lie in a middle ground between mundane experience, from which it is difficult to maintain one's distance, and scientific practice, which generally avoids subjective qualities" ([1973] 1994, 35).

Gardner's view of modes and vectors is at the heart of his work.

Let me try to flesh out what I am proposing. Initially the modes are limited to a few aspects of bodily functioning—the young infant feels openness or closedness, emptiness or fullness, particularly at the regions of the mouth, but perhaps also throughout his body. Two trends occur during the first year of life. First, he becomes increasingly able to transfer these modal experiences, which occur initially within his body, or in relation to objects in contact with his body, to the perception and making of objects external to himself. Second, he becomes sensitive to subtle nuances within each mode and to a multiplicity of modal and vectoral properties. The modes and vectors become a set of categories that he can bring to bear on the full range of his experience; in addition they come to combine with one another in diverse ways, giving rise to distinct emotions, styles, aesthetic categories, and temperamental strains. A basic set of modes and vectors, founded in bodily experience, interact and coalesce with one another to form a much larger set of general categories through which the child comes to know the world. The child at the threshold of symbol use conceives of the world in significant part as a flux of these different primary and secondary general properties, which have their origin in his organismic experience and which now pervade his experience of objects and persons. ([1973] 1994, 108)

No appreciation of object permanence is necessary for modal/vector sensitivity, so the modes and vectors are more primitive than objects. Pre-verbal children and artists have a heightened sensitivity to this aspect of knowing and communication. Sometimes this "heightened sensitivity," it seems, returns to those who are not artists when they enter the second naïveté. In a way, we all become artists at that time, and our art is life itself.

Some of this sensitivity is always with us. When an object in the world is the focus of our interest, we call that *denotation*. When we meditate on what that object means to us, we shift to the modal/vector

aspect of the experience, the *connotation*. The language of everyday is a mixture of connotative and denotative tendencies. In some specialized language domains, such as the language of science, art criticism, and so on, the denotative tendency rules. In art the connotative tendency takes over. The symbolic referencing we do after entering the second naïveté also shows deep appreciation for the connotations of words.

Gardner expanded his study of the making process—the third of three themes discussed in *The Arts and Human Development*—in *Creating Minds: An Anatomy of Creativity Seen through the Lives of Freud, Einstein, Picasso, Stravinsky, Eliot, Graham, and Gandhi* (1993). An individual's second naïveté, it seems, will follow a natural preference for one of Gardner's seven ways of knowing and the style of creativity that each entails.

Gardner notes that creative breakthroughs are more likely to take place when the creator is surrounded by people with whom he or she is comfortable. The creative process apparently shuts down when people feel unsafe. A creator also must deal with what Gardner called a "Faustian bargain," the decision to preserve his or her unusual gifts at the cost of a well-rounded personal existence. Unless the bargain is compulsively adhered to the talent may be compromised, or even lost.

Given these discoveries, we can predict that it is easier to enter the second naïveté when there are people around us who support this way of looking at the world. Second, some people move through the gate earlier than others, because they are no longer interested in what society may consider a "well-rounded personal existence." The creativity it takes to enter the third great gate cannot be overestimated. It requires a huge shift in the way meaning is made. In some sense the shift carries people beyond modern and postmodern points of view into a more timeless and less culture-bound realm.

Kearney writes that there is an ethical summons "lodged at the very heart of our postmodern culture," a "poetic summons" to see that "imagination continues to playfully create and re-create even at the moment it is announcing its own disappearance" (1988, 397). The imagination is nourished by silence, and in the early stages of the creative process works mostly in silence. This is where iconic and indexical referencing thrive, giving flower to insights later coded into symbolic referencing.

If a discovery has been nourished by silence it will remain informed by and inform our modes of being and vectors of movement. It

is, after all, in the silence of the brain's right hemisphere that we orient ourselves in space and time. When creativity takes place only at the level of symbolic referencing, as in the extreme example of Williams syndrome, then referencing is severed from body-knowing. The disembodied words seem superficial and remain mostly irrelevant to the fundamental issues of existence such as aloneness, freedom, death, and the need for meaning.

It is not enough, then, to make a rational compromise between the modern search for certainty and the perpetual suspicion of post-modernism. A balancing act or wager is not enough. What needs to be done is to help people pass through the third great gate, and to enter their second naïveté. This is so they can engage in silent knowing and show its value to others, especially the young. Children need to be around people who know what W. B. Yeats discovered late in life and wrote about in his last letter:

I am happy and I think full of an energy, of an energy I had despaired of. It seems to me that I have found what I wanted. When I try to put all into a phrase I say, "Man can embody truth but he cannot know it." I must embody it in the completion of my life. The abstract is not life and everywhere draws out its contradictions. You can refute Hegel but not the Saint or the Song of Sixpence.

This brings me to a conclusion: Silence is necessary for human beings to communicate and create existential meaning. Religious education must, therefore, be deeply concerned about what it shows about silence. To conclude I will apply what has been discovered to the daily task of telling sacred stories.

A CONCLUDING APPLICATION OF SILENCE

I was relieved to discover that when Gabriel Marcel first read Max Picard's classic, *The World of Silence*, he was "disconcerted" (Picard [1948] 1988, 9). Marcel had trouble thinking about silence as something positive rather than as the lack of something. I had the same reaction, but am now ready to say that silence is not only positive but necessary for human beings if they are to find meaning and to be creative. Picard, too, went further than calling silence positive. He called it "an autonomous phenomenon," which is positive, even creative, and wrote that it belongs to the "basic structure of man" ([1948] 1988, 15).

Religious educators have many tasks in which to show silence, but a primary task is the telling of the sacred stories of their tradition.

These narratives invite people to become acquainted with silence so they can approach The Silence, the Source of life. The great narrative of the Christian people, for example, needs to be told in a way that is soaked in silence. The storyteller needs to disappear so as not to distract the participating listener from the depth of the stories, which is physically present in the modes and vectors in which the words are rooted. Such meaning is bound neither by space or time.

At the silent level of modes and vectors Christianity is about moving toward and away from, about wholeness and breaking, about being empty and full. Those who enter the Christian story pass through religious language into the nonverbal. It is only in the silence of presence beyond the language that one can build an interpretation of adequate depth and usefulness for one's life and death.

Storytellers also need to trust their own silence to receive and absorb the noise of those trying to learn, or trying to avoid learning, how to enter the story. If we cannot take in and defuse such noise, listeners will not be able to learn how to hear the silence. This shows those who are distracted and distracting that they are missing something powerful and tangible.

The story's depth is the connotation that connects the words with iconic and indexical referencing. This depth is intuited because it is true nonverbally, although we are accustomed to trying to verify it verbally. God is known first and most directly in the silence of the iconic and indexical referencing.

Teaching silence, then, is a game of high stakes, but the answer to the question of how to teach it is simple. We must show it. This is because there is much more to words than more words. Words, in fact, can become like "so much straw," as Saint Thomas said at the end of his life after a profound, nonverbal experience of convergence in the Mass.

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